

The Oxted School Sixth Form Guide to **University Applications**



**Student Guide
for September 2025 Entry**

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WHAT IS UCAS?

The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service is the organisation responsible for managing applications to higher education courses in the UK. UCAS manage almost **three million** applications, from around **700,000** people, each year, for full-time undergraduate courses at over **380** universities and colleges across the UK.

To make things run as smoothly as possible, UCAS provide everything you need online: from making your application through to tracking your offers. You can search for courses and follow links to individual university and college websites, read information about finance, and much more besides. www.ucas.com

There is also a very useful section on the UCAS website covering alternatives to university: Apprenticeships, Internships, Gap Year and Study Abroad. Each of these offer links to employers and organisations, apprenticeship vacancies and a sign-up service for alerts, and much more.

They have resources especially for parents and guardians too, at www.ucas.com/parents

A successful UCAS application is best achieved when student, school and home are ALL actively involved.

Step 1 – Planning, research, virtual visits

Step 2 – Choosing courses: deciding what to study and where.

Step 3 – Apply online through your UCAS Hub page. You can apply for up to 5 courses (but no more than 4 choices in any one of medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, or veterinary science).

Step 4 – Offers: check progress via your Hub page. This will be updated as you receive decisions from universities and colleges.

Step 5 – Make your final two course choices – Firm and Insurance, depending on predicted grades, offers received and personal preference. If you accept an unconditional offer as your firm choice then you don't select an insurance choice.

Step 6 – Funding your study – <https://www.gov.uk/student-finance> for information. Apply for accommodation. This is done directly with the University and not via UCAS.

Step 7 – Results Day - you can check your Hub page to see if your place has been confirmed for your chosen course. (UCAS receive most exam results direct from the exam boards.)

Step 8 – Are you eligible for Clearing? If you have received different grades than you expected, or have changed your mind, there may be other options available. You need to look at Track and at course vacancies at www.ucas.com.

Step 9 – Start University or College - it is up to you to make sure you have everything ready, such as accommodation, finances, travel arrangements, books and equipment required for the course.



It is probably the biggest decision of your life so far –

Choosing a Course

Becoming a student in higher education (HE) is a big step, and there are important questions you will need to consider as there are so many courses and Universities to choose from. The choice includes a significant number of further education colleges which offer higher education courses, affiliated to a university. <https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/courses>

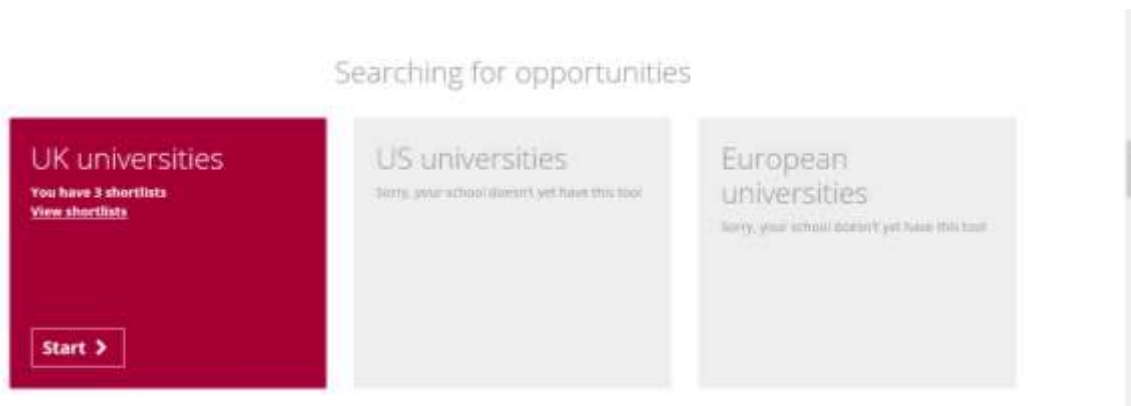
Progression from school can lead to full-time undergraduate courses or more flexible courses, such as part-time, distance learning, online or on a degree level apprenticeship. The majority of these can be found on www.ucas.com/search

There are also links to apprenticeships. With so many options available, choosing a course can be a difficult decision.

It is a good idea to set up a UCAS hub account as soon as possible.

The UCAS Hub account allows students to access all the information needed to research courses and Universities. As an example, it is possible to enter A level subjects and a list of suitable degree courses is generated.

Also - The Unifrog website offers a great way of searching for courses that match your expected grades. Just click on the UK Universities sections shown below.



What are you looking for?

Is your intended profession or career dependent on a specific degree?

Do you enjoy a particular subject or subject combination and wish to study it in greater depth?

Think about what you enjoy and can do well, both at school and outside. It doesn't even have to be a subject you studied at school: there is a far wider variety of subjects available than in the secondary education curriculum, and work experience, a job or a hobby may have triggered an interest.

More decisions ...

Single honours - you study one main subject, usually with the option of taking up to 25% of your degree in another subject.

Joint honours - where you study two subjects on a 50:50 basis.

Part-time study - you can take a full-time degree programme on a half-time basis, or do an honours degree by working your way through interim awards.

Honours degree with a foundation year. If, for whatever reason, you do not have appropriate qualifications for direct entry, some honours degrees offer a foundation year.

Foundation degrees. These are degree level qualifications designed in association with employers – combining academic skills and knowledge with workplace performance and productivity. They're ideal if you're unsure about taking a full degree or if you want to study while you work. They equate to the first two years of a Bachelors degree. There are usually good progression routes on to a related honours degree or a specific top-up honours degree.

Higher National Diplomas are two year full time (or three year part time) courses which once completed can lead to entry on the final year of a degree course. HND courses are vocational in nature as they prepare you for careers in specific areas of industry. More 'learning by doing' and highly valued by employers, most HND courses require one A level for entry.

Top-up honours degrees are one year programmes designed to allow progression from foundation degrees or HNDs to bachelor honours degree level.

What are the entry requirements?

Make sure the entry requirements are in line with your predicted grades. If you are at all unsure, contact the admissions tutor for your chosen subject. Entry requirements may be specific grades at A level & possibly in specific subjects too, or tariff points, or a mix of both. Check on GCSE requirements too. BTEC Extended Certificate qualifications are also acceptable at most universities. Admissions officers will be encouraged by an Extended Project qualification in a topic related to your course choice and have been known to lower their offer accordingly.

Consider how a course is structured?

- Are you able to diversify and acquire new skills by studying topics outside your main subject area?
- Many courses are modular. This means they are made up of different subject blocks which deal with particular areas of interest. You may have some say over some of all of the modules you study. It is important to look at the components that will make up your course, and compare against the same course at other institutions
- Taking a language normally includes a year of studying or working abroad
- Does a course include a sandwich year of working in industry?
- Science-based subjects can include full-day practical laboratory sessions
- What is the proportion of private study and reading to lectures and tutorials?
- How is the courses assessed? How much of the course is assessed by final exam, coursework, or ongoing assessments?

What type of university and where?

For example: a specialist institution for the creative arts, or somewhere renowned for research and development, or a tradition of academia; traditional or modern, city centre or rural town, large campus or small college, within a 3 hour drive of home or much further afield; does it have a wide and thriving extracurricular programme with opportunities to continue your favourite hobbies, or introduce you to new ones.

Should you put your career choice first?

Before you apply for a particular course, think about the kind of career you would like it to lead to. Some professions require a specific degree i.e. if you want to be a scientist, lawyer, doctor or vet.

To help you make your choice

You can access lots of information to help you decide. An excellent starting point is the UCAS website – use the course database to search for particular subjects and courses. Read **University and department prospectuses**. Search via the **Web** and examine the official (and unofficial student) sites. Hard copies of Prospectuses are available in the study room.

Look at **independent university guides** such as Virgin Alternative Guide, Times Guide, Push Guide, Heap's 'Degree Course Offers' and 'Choosing Your Degree Course and University'.

League tables help you investigate which universities are best for particular courses: [The Guardian University Guide 2023 – the rankings | University guide | The Guardian](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/09/04/the-guardian-university-guide-2023-rankings)
www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk

Attending **Open Days** at universities is the best way to get a feel for the place and to find out more about the courses, accommodation, location and transport links and facilities. You will meet and ask questions of Admissions Tutors, faculty staff and chat to undergraduates for an insider's view. **If you are unable to attend open days then virtual tours and online events are being offered by universities. You still need to sign up for these.**

Go on **Taster Courses** - a number of universities and colleges offer short 'taster' courses, giving you the chance to experience academic and social life. Most of these courses are free and they vary in length from one day to a full week. There are also a few summer courses available. You would experience lectures and tutorials and have the chance to mingle with students who share your academic interests. Demonstrating your commitment to a course will also look good in the personal statement on your UCAS application.

So how do you make the decision?

Choosing a University

By deciding on a course you will have started to narrow down the choices of University. However, there may be many universities or colleges that offer a course that appeals to you, especially if you are considering a common subject such as English or History, so you will also want to think about other criteria.

Most students have some idea of the location they want to be in – whether it's in the south of England, by the sea, miles away from or close to home. Many students opt for somewhere that is far enough away from their families to be independent but not too far to get home in a crisis,



usually two or three hours drive away. When you've found five to ten universities that appeal to you, you will need to find out more about them.

<https://www.unifrog.org/> is a comparison tool that we highly recommend. Find out how University Courses in the UK rank against each other on lots of factors - everything from Fees to Distance from home to Accommodation cost to Employability and Average starting salaries. User log on details are available from the Sixth Form office. You can set your preferred criteria to narrow down to the 5-10 best courses for you.

Visit www.opendays.com for dates of Open Days.

Things to consider when researching universities

- ❖ Do you want to study at a campus or non-campus university?
- ❖ How far away from home do you want to be?
- ❖ Are the transport links good?
- ❖ What sort of location would you like to be in? For example, a country town or large city, or close to the coast.
- ❖ What is the local environment like? Do you like the area?
- ❖ What is the university's reputation like? League tables published by national newspapers will give you an indication of teaching quality and graduate employability.
- ❖ What bursaries/scholarships do they offer?
- ❖ How many students attend the university? Is this important to you?
- ❖ Is your course within a large faculty? Will you be well supported in your studies?

- ❖ How does the course compare with similar courses at other universities?
- ❖ What is the accommodation like?
- ❖ What are the study facilities like? For example, libraries and IT facilities.
- ❖ How good are the social and sporting facilities? Does the university offer the sport or society that you want?
- ❖ Are the support services good? For example, medical, financial and disability support. Will you need special help, such as dyslexia support?



While at university or college you will have two main costs - tuition fees and living costs.

Most students will not have to pay anything up front. Depending on your circumstances, your course and where you study, you could get a range of financial support. The main types of finance are tuition fee and maintenance loans (which have to be paid back), and grants and bursaries (which don't).

There is also extra support for those with special circumstances, for example, if you have children or adult dependents, a disability, mental-health condition, or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia or dyspraxia.

Repayments are based on future earnings and not on what you borrow. You only repay once you have left university and earn over a threshold.

Applying is easy and you do not have to have a confirmed place - simply use your first choice of course and change it online at a later date if you need to.

For full information, advice and how to apply for loans, go to Student Finance England website or <https://www.gov.uk/student-finance>

Types of University

Ancient Universities

Refers to medieval and renaissance universities that have continued to exist. Because no universities were founded in these countries between the 17th and 19th centuries, an ancient university effectively means one that was founded before the 19th century.

University of Oxford
University of Cambridge
University of St Andrews
University of Glasgow
University of Aberdeen
University of Edinburgh
Durham University

The Russell Group

The Russell Group represents 24 leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with business and the public sector.

University of Birmingham
University of Bristol
University of Cambridge
Cardiff University
Durham University
University of Edinburgh
University of Exeter
University of Glasgow
Imperial College London
King's College London
University of Leeds
University of Liverpool

London School of Economics & Political
Science
University of Manchester
Newcastle University
University of Nottingham
University of Oxford
Queen Mary, University of London
Queen's University Belfast
University of Sheffield
University of Southampton
University College London
University of Warwick
University of York

Jargon Busting

Admissions Office

The university department that processes applications and advises students on the suitability of their qualifications for degree courses.

Alumni

Graduates or former students of a university.

Bachelor's Degree

The qualification studied towards as an undergraduate, also known as a first degree or undergraduate degree. Can be a Bachelor of Arts or BA (generally associated with humanities, arts, language and social science subjects), a Bachelor of Science or BSc (for courses in science, technology and some business and social science subjects) a Bachelor of Engineering (BEng) or a Bachelor of Law (LLB).

Bursary

Non-repayable financial support for eligible students available from universities and organisations.

Campus

The buildings and grounds of a university or college including teaching, shops, accommodation, sports and entertainment facilities.

Clearing

A period when late applications can be submitted.

Combined/Joint Honours

A degree in which a student combines two different subjects.

Deferred Entry

Application for a university place (through UCAS) more than one year before you intend to start the course.

Degree

A qualification awarded by a university after satisfactory level has been achieved.

Dissertation/Research Project

An extended essay or report (8,000 to 12,000 words) on a specific subject area, written in the final year of an undergraduate honours degree course.

Faculties

Subject departments in a university. Sometimes known as Academic Schools.

FE (Further Education)

Fe colleges run A levels, GCSEs, BTECs, HNCs, HNDs, foundation degrees, full degrees and access and short courses.

Foundation Course

The course that is taken prior to degree-level study to bring students up to the required standard.

Freshers

What new university students are known as. A Fresher's Week may be organised as an introduction to university life. This can include social events, society fairs, and introductions to the library and computer resources.

Gap Year

Many students take a year out between school and university, often to travel, study or work to gain experience and save money for university.

Graduate

Someone who has successfully completed their first degree.

Halls (of residence)

University-owned accommodation that students often stay in during their first year.

HE (Higher Education)

Study beyond A level, including higher national certificates (HNC) and diplomas (HND), foundation degrees, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees.

HE Maintenance Grant

Non-repayable financial support from the Government available to eligible students to help with living costs at university.

HNC/HND (Higher National Certificates/Diplomas)

These are practical two year courses. Students who successfully complete courses may progress onto an appropriate undergraduate degree.

Hons (degree with honours)

This is a full undergraduate degree – usually requiring the completion of a dissertation or research project.

Lecture

The formal instruction; a university academic talks to a large class and there is little or no group discussion.

Master Class

This is a session designed to give a taste of studying a subject at university.

Open Days

Some universities have subject-specific open days, where students and their families can visit a university to find out more about the course they are interested in and the university.

Offer

An offer of a place on a course at university – this may be a conditional offer, dependent on A-level results, or an unconditional offer.

Postgraduate Study

A programme of study or research leading to a master's degree or PhD.

Sandwich Course

An undergraduate degree that includes a work-placement year.

Scholarship

A non-repayable grant awarded to a student based on a range of criteria. This varies greatly between each institution. Scholarships are frequently awarded for merit. Regional scholarships are also being offered by some institutions to local schools/colleges.

Semester/Term

The university academic year is either divided into two semesters or three terms, this is dependent on the university.

Seminar

More interactive than a lecture. A group of students meet to discuss a subject with a tutor.

Single Honours

An undergraduate degree focusing on one subject area (or group of related subject areas).

SU (Students' Union)

NUS (National Union of Students)

This is a national organisation run for students by students. Every university has its own S U which can provide advice and guidance for students on many aspects of university life including; finance, accommodation, employment and academic issues, as well as organising entertainment and social events.

Tariff System

Designed to help students calculate whether they meet course entry requirements.

Taster session

Gives a taste of a subject at the specific university it is held at.

Tutorials

Are the smaller classes where you can ask questions, clarify what you have learnt, participate in activities, and present set "homework". Attendance at tutorials often counts towards your final semester mark.

Undergraduate

Someone studying for their first degree.

How to get on the Course you want

All university Admissions Officers will require you to gain certain grades or tariff points in order to be admitted onto a course. Before you apply make sure that you have the right information:

- Research the course to make sure it is right for you, look at what is covered in the modules, the style of teaching, assessment methods etc.
- Ask for help and talk to parents, your tutor, the Sixth Form team
- Make sure your predicted A level grades match those asked for by the course providers, not just overall grades but also subject-specific grades. Check GCSE requirements too – English, Maths and Science in particular
- Be realistic in your choices and include a range of courses with a range of entry requirements
- Visit the universities on Open Days (these can be virtual open days) to make sure that they are the right place for you. No two universities are alike!
- Use your Personal Statement to promote yourself in the best possible way
- Apply early – some providers start to interview in October/November. Don't risk missing out on a place by applying late.

If you are applying for **Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary medicine, & some Law** courses, some universities will require you to take an **additional test: UCAT, LNAT**.

Mathematics courses at Cambridge and elsewhere may require the **STEP** test. English at Oxford require the **ELAT**. There are an increasing number of tests for different Oxbridge courses and you will also be asked to provide a sample of recent work – a marked essay for example.

More information about these tests is available from the Sixth Form team. **Always check the course entry requirements on each university's website.**

There are many organisations offering support for applications in these fields (interviews, tests, current topics etc).



UCAS Tariff Points System

UCAS tariff points are used by some universities (around a third) when making conditional offers. Instead of asking for grades (e.g. BBC), a university may express the offer as 112 points. However, not all universities use tariff points. The more traditional universities are more likely to make an offer stipulating grades and not points. Also, universities may not, for example, consider BBB at A level to be the same as ABC at A level.

Entry requirements and offers that state tariff points may also require a minimum level of achievement in a specified subject, for example '128 points from a minimum of three A levels to include grade A in A level Chemistry', i.e. an A in Chemistry (48) and B grades in two other A levels (40+40).

Although tariff points can be accumulated in different ways, not all points will necessarily be acceptable for entry to a particular course. The achievement of a points score, therefore, does not give an automatic entitlement to entry and many other factors are taken into account in the admissions process.

Using the table below, you can calculate how to convert A level and BTEC grades into tariff points for those universities who use the tariff system:

Look on <https://www.ucas.com/ucas/tariff-calculator>

This table shows the new Tariff points for some popular qualifications.

Extended Project Qualification	AS level	A level	Tariff points	BTEC National Extended Certificate
		A*	56	D*
		A	48	D
		B	40	
		C	32	M
A*			28	
A		D	24	
B	A		20	
C	B	E	16	P
D	C		12	
	D		10	
E			8	
	E		6	

The OXTED Sixth form University Application Process Key Dates 2024/2025

2024

During Year 12 and the summer holiday - discuss and try to identify five final choices of courses and Universities. Also, complete extra reading and research for your personal statement and then write it.

June	Book UCAT and LNAT admissions tests Attend Open days End of Year 12 exams which contribute to predicted grades Year 12 UCAS Application day – off timetable
August	Book Oxford University Admission tests
September	Completed applications can be submitted to UCAS. Lunchtime UCAS clinics start in the Library on Wednesdays. Complete entry forms for Oxford and Cambridge Admissions tests
September 30	Our recommended final date for all Dentistry, Medicine, Veterinary Medicine and Veterinary Science applications and for all courses at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Be aware that Oxford and Cambridge also have their own admissions tests in certain subjects
October 15	Deadline (6pm) for applications to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and for most courses in medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine/science.
W/B October 21	Assessment tests for Oxford start
November	UCAS clinics increase to Wednesday and Thursday lunchtimes. Predicted grades are sent to Year 13s. Notified of interviews for Oxford, Cambridge and Medical schools
December	University Interviews take place

2025

- January 4** **Internal deadline for UCAS applications forms to be completed and submitted to the School's UCAS adviser.**
- January** **Notification of offers from Oxford and Cambridge**
- January 29 External Deadline (6pm) for the **Sixth Form Team** to submit forms to UCAS including references and predicted grades for the majority of undergraduate courses
- February Students set up a log in for Student Finance England
- February Extra opens – if you've used all 5 choices and have no offers, you might be able to add another choice
- March Registration for additional Maths STEP papers open. Required for some Maths Degree courses. The exams are normally in June.
- May** **Year 13 should have heard back from all of the Universities they have applied to and will be able to select a firm choice and an insurance choice of course.**
- June** **Expected deadline for selecting a firm choice and an insurance course choice. Normal time for applying for accommodation at firm choice of University.**
- July Clearing and Clearing Plus open for late applicants.
- August A-level results and University offers are confirmed. If a student does not have a confirmed offer on results day, then help with clearing is offered.

The UCAS Application Process

Your UCAS Application

A summary of the online process

Your application does not have to be completed all at once. The system allows you to leave a section partially completed so you can return to it later and change any information you have entered. Full explanations and help text are available for each section.

- Complete your application form following the instructions given on the following pages. Let your tutor know that you are working on your form and discuss your Personal Statement with them. Expect to review your Personal Statement several times – it is a very important aspect of your application and we are keen to help you make the most of it. Meanwhile, your tutor and teachers will be working on the Reference the school provides on you.
- When you have completed your form, **DO NOT** follow the instructions to submit the form. Just let Mrs L'Estrange know that you have completed it so that it can be checked carefully.
- When a member of the Sixth Form team has made a final check of your personal statement and the entire application, they will tell you to **'submit'**. This is the final step of your involvement in your application and you will be asked to make an online payment.
- Mrs L'Estrange will now add the school's reference, comprised of subject references by your teachers and tutor reference. If, during this time, alterations are needed to your form, then you will be required to make them.
- Your form will then be sent by the school to UCAS. We will invite you to be present when it is sent, giving you an opportunity to read the Reference, and make a final check with you that all is correct.

This process takes time, especially as the team will be dealing with several forms at any one time.

Oxbridge, dentistry, veterinary and medical applications must reach UCAS by 15 October. Please allow plenty of time for us to process your application. Aim to submit the application before 1 October latest.

To help you through the application process, the Sixth Form team holds a UCAS Clinic in the Library.

More Information – Writing Your Personal Statement

The Personal Statement section is one of the most important elements of your application. It is your chance to catch the university admissions officers' eye and the best opportunity to present yourself and stand out from the crowd. It is crucial that your statement reflects your personality, as well as showing your motivation and commitment to your chosen course. This is not the time for modesty!

It could make the difference between

- being selected for an offer or rejection
- being selected for an interview

The Key Points Admissions Officers are looking for in a Personal Statement

- ↔ **enthusiasm and motivation for the subject**
- ↔ **awareness of what you are applying to do**
- ↔ **the potential to succeed.**

We suggest you structure your Personal Statement around the following sections:

Section 1 - Writing about your choice of course

This will be the longest section - show enthusiasm, be original and say why you are interested and what sparked your interest? What specific topics do you enjoy? If you're applying for more than one course, try to identify common factors. Show you have researched your chosen course.

Reason

Enjoy the subject
Enjoy specific aspects of the subject
Look forward to studying in greater depth
Look forward to putting theory into practice
Post degree aims – particular career path
Any other reasons

Explanation

State why
State which aspects
State specific interests
Anything in particular?
How does the course fit?
Explain

Write about experiences you have had that relate to the course and reflect on what you found out:

- **Have you been on any study visits, or attended any talks or conferences?**
- **Write about any relevant books, articles, journals you have read or programmes/TED talks you have watched.**
- **Are you a member of a relevant society?**
- Have you spent time on any relevant weekend courses or exchanges?
- Has a particular experience or event influenced your choice?
- How about hobbies – are they connected to your subject?

Section 2 - Writing about school life

Why did you choose your subjects? Show any links between your current A levels and your intended course and career. Mention any relevant fieldwork, coursework or research you have undertaken. Are you going to do the Extended Project? Tell what your topic is and how it relates to your intended degree path.

What community activities have you enjoyed?

House Captain	Sixth Form Council	School Council
Sports events - interhouse	Sports teams	Coaching/ CSLA
Drama performance	Behind the scenes	Directing/producing
Music concerts	Choir/Band/Orchestra	Teaching/rehearsing
Charitable events	Fundraising	Sponsorships
Subject Captain	Teaching assistant	Department helper
Pupil mentor	Tutor group helper	Paired reader
Open Evening guide		Drama Festival
Club organiser	Event's organiser	House trips organiser
Community Volunteer	Duke of Edinburgh Award	Young Enterprise Scheme

Is there anything in particular that shows your personal qualities or personal development? Determination, perseverance, desire for a challenge, sociability etc. etc.

Section 3 - Writing about RELEVANT Work Experience

This is of particular interest to the Admissions Officer if it tells him/her something about you i.e. was it an unusual placement, and/or does it relate to your chosen course?

Has work experience consolidated your interest? If so, state how and be specific about what you have learnt. If you were given a specific task, write about what you did, whether it had a successful outcome, was it adopted. Did you make a presentation?

Mention what skills you have developed:

Communication	Listening, speaking
Problem solving	Using initiative
Diplomacy	Confidentiality
Team work	Working independently
Managing others	Leadership
Time management	Working to deadlines

Section 4 - Writing about interests and experiences outside school

If you are planning a Gap Year, describe what you intend doing – voluntary work, paid employment, travel plans, working overseas etc. and whether it is relevant to your course and what you expect to gain from it.

Write about interests and experiences outside school if you have **something of interest to say**. Talk about achievements of which you are most proud. Mention any sports you are involved in – success in competitions, county standards, club membership, position of responsibility.

Section 5 - Your concluding statement

This section should bring the reader's attention back to either your choice of degree or your ability to succeed at university. It should be a summary paragraph about your strengths, dedication, what you have to offer or why they should make you an offer.